



NEWS RELEASE

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Free Auto Body Inspection Program Launches National Consumer Protection Week

SACRAMENTO — Knowledge is power. It also helps shield consumers from frauds and scams. The Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) encourages all California consumers to increase their knowledge during National Consumer Protection Week, February 4-10, 2007, and throughout the year by boosting their marketplace I.Q. through the free information and services DCA provides.

The 2007 theme for National Consumer Protection Week, “Read Up and Reach Out: Be an Informed Consumer,” is a call to action for Californians to arm themselves with information, then share their knowledge with friends and family.

“The better informed a consumer is, the less likely that person is to fall victim to unscrupulous business practices,” said Charlene Zettel, Director of the Department of Consumer Affairs. Equally important, noted Zettel, is for consumers to learn how DCA can help direct them to the appropriate complaint or mediation channels.

As part of that effort, DCA’s Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) will bring back its popular Auto Body Inspection Program, which allows qualified consumers to receive free inspections from BAR personnel to verify the repair work done on their cars.

“National Consumer Protection Week is the perfect time to highlight the Auto Body Inspection Program,” said Zettel. “The program allows qualified consumers to find out if the auto body repairs they paid for were actually performed. It also provides an excellent opportunity for consumers to find out if their auto body repairs were done safely and correctly.”

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“We are excited to be reintroducing this program,” said BAR Chief Sherry Mehl. “We know the majority of auto body repair shops in California are run by honest, hard-working people, but one of our priorities is to make sure consumers are protected. The Auto Body Inspection Program gives us another tool to do just that.”

DCA is also home to the California Office of Privacy Protection (COPP) which, until last year, was the only state-funded office in the nation designed to educate and advocate on behalf of consumers who have privacy protection concerns or have been victims of identity theft.

Zettel said it is easy for consumers to take advantage of the Department’s free resources by calling, toll-free, 1-800-952-5210, or visiting www.dca.ca.gov. Many publications are available in foreign languages and operators are able to assist non-English speaking callers.

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The mission of the California Department of Consumer Affairs is to protect and serve consumers while ensuring a fair and competitive marketplace. We protect and serve consumers by making available information that educates them about their rights and responsibilities. We help ensure a competent and fair marketplace by establishing minimum standards of competency in over 100 business and 200 professional categories - including doctors, dentists, cosmetologists, contractors, and automotive repair shops.



Reporters' Backgrounder: Auto Body Inspection Program

The original Auto Body Inspection Program was a huge success with consumers when it was introduced as a two-year pilot program in 2001. DCA/BAR returned more than half a million dollars in rework and adjustments to California consumers.

In an effort to better serve consumers, the Auto body Inspection Program has been reintroduced. It allows qualified consumers to receive free inspections to verify the collision repair work done on their cars. BAR inspectors will determine if consumers were billed for parts and/or labor that were not provided.

To qualify for the free inspection a consumer must have a copy of their repair invoice listing all repairs performed. Qualified consumers can call DCA toll-free at (800) 952-5210, or call BAR's toll-free number at (866) 799-3811 to schedule an appointment.

After the appointment is made, a state inspector will come to the consumer's home or office at their convenience. If BAR inspectors find any problems with the repair work, the consumer will have the option to:

- Have the inspectors open a complaint that will be investigated by a BAR field representative;
- Contact his or her insurance company for a follow-up with BAR; or
- Choose not to pursue the issue.

If BAR inspectors find no discrepancies, they will document the result and thank the consumer for participating in the program. Whatever action the consumer chooses, BAR may also choose to independently investigate any apparent violations of the Automotive Repair Act found during the inspections.

Consumers who feel they have been victimized by an auto repair or auto body shop can file a complaint by calling the Department of Consumer Affairs' Consumer Information Center at (800) 952-5210. They can also file complaints online at the Bureau of Automotive Repair Web sites: www.autorepair.ca.gov or www.smogcheck.ca.gov.